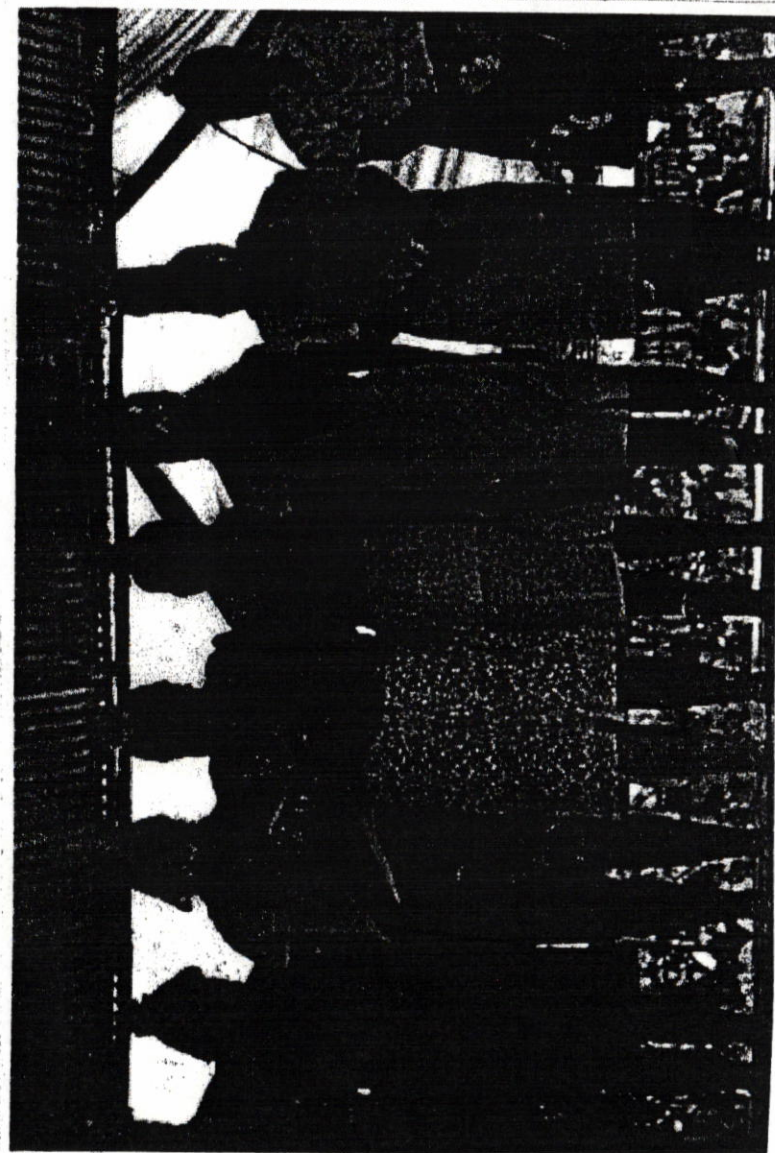


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by Subcommandante Marcos
December 2, 2000
(reprinted from zmag.org)

"Senor Fox:

Six years ago we wrote a letter to Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de Leon, your predecessor. Now that you are the new head of the federal executive it's my duty to inform you that as of today you have inherited a war in the south east of Mexico: a war declared on the first of January 1, 1994 by the Zapatista Army of National Liberation against the federal government, demanding democracy, liberty, and justice for all Mexicans.

"From the beginning of the uprising we faced the federal government in conformity with the laws of war and the rules of military honor. Since then, the army has attacked us without regard for military honor and in violation of the international treaties. More than 70 thousand federal troops (including around 20 thousand "counterinsurgency specialists") have besieged and persecuted the Zapatistas for two thousand five hundred twenty five days (counting today). Two thousand of those days the army has been in violation of the Law of Dialogue, Negotiation and Dignified Peace in Chiapas, expounded by the Congress of the Union on March 10, 1995.

"During these six years of the war the Zapatistas have resisted and we have faced two federal executives (self titled 'presidents'), two secretaries of National Defense, six secretaries of Government, five commissions of the 'peace', five 'governors' of Chiapas and a multitude of mid-level functionaries. All of them are now gone. Some are being investigated for their links with organized crime, others are in exile, and some others are unemployed.

"During these six years the Zapatistas have insisted, time and again, on the path of dialogue. We have done so because we have made a promise to the civil society to keep our arms silent and to try for a peaceful solution.

"Now that you have assumed the title of the head of the federal executive, you should know that, in addition to inheriting a war in the south east of Mexico, you inherit the opportunity to choose how to confront it.

"You will understand...that a lack of confidence in everything that is government...has been impressed on our thinking and our actions.

"...It's my duty as well to inform you that with the Zapatistas (and I believe to more than just the Zapatistas) you have zero credibility and confidence.

"We cannot confide in someone who has shown the superficiality and ignorance to claim that the demands of indigeous people will be resolved with televisions and shopping.

"We cannot give credit to someone who is willing to 'forget' (because that is what 'amnesty' means) the hundreds of crimes committed by the paramilitaries and the patrons who grant them immunity.

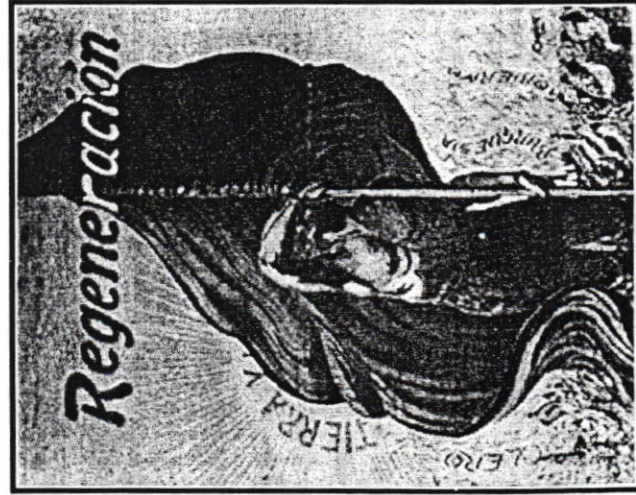
"We cannot give our confidence to someone, who, with all the short-sightedness of management logic, has a plan of government converting the indigenus people into mini-micro-business people or in employees of businesses in this six-year presidency. At the end of the day, this plan is nothing more than an attempt to continue the ethnocide which, under different modalities, has been the Mexican reality under neoliberalism....

"Those who have tried to eliminate us with guns have failed. Those who try to eliminate us by converting us into business people will fail as well.

Ricardo Flores Magon was imprisoned at Leavenworth Federal Penitentiary. He suffered from diabetes, a condition which became a death sentence at the intentional negligence of prison officials. He died in 1922.

His death shook the people of Mexico, who came in crowds to meet his corpse at the border. In every town the procession stopped at there flew red and black flags of anarcho-syndacalism. 10,000 working people escorted his body to a tomb of "high honors" that the Mexican people had demanded from the government.

Today the spirit of Magon lives on at the Zapatista Auntonomous Community named after him in the jungles of Chiapas.



"...You can worry or not that a group of Mexicans, mainly indigenous, are not in agreement with the corporate plan or with the belligerence of the right. But don't forget that if the PRI <the Mexican political party that ruled Mexico for 71 years through fraud and might> lost power it is because the majority of Mexicans rebelled and threw it out.

"That rebellion is not over.

"You and your team, since July 2nd, have done nothing but insist that the citizenry return to conformity and immobility. But it's not going to be that way. You neoliberal project will face the resistance of millions.

"We fight for change...democracy, liberty, and justice...There is still much missing. For example, the indigenous people are missing. Their rights and culture are unrecognized in the constitution...The demilitarization and deparamilitarization are missing. Freedom for political prisoners is missing...An economic program that satisfies the needs of the most poor is missing...And peace, peace is also missing.

"Senor Fox: for more than six months your predecessor Zedillo claimed he wanted to dialogue and made war on us. He chose confrontation and lost. Now you have the chance to choose.

"If you choose the path of dialogue, sincerely, seriously, and respectfully, just show us that with deeds. You can rest assured that you will receive a positive response from us. That way we can reinstitute dialogue and, soon, begin to construct a real peace.

:In the public communication we've sent you, the EZLN has made know a series of minimal signals by the federal executive. If you provide these, everything will be ready to return to dialogue.

...."Vale. Salud and I hope it's true that in Mexico and in Chiapas there will be a new dawn.

"From the mountains of southeastern Mexico, for the CCRI-EZLN

"Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos"

Despite overwhelming illiteracy, "Regeneracion", Magon's paper, had reached a circulation of 27,000 a week.

In May of 1911, the PLM in collusion with the radical labor union the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) seized Tijuana and several other border towns, creating a daring but short-lived anarchist foothold in Baja California.

That same month, Mexican reformer Madero signed a peace treaty with Diaz. The new regime ordered attacks on the PLM as the towns were re-taken by government troops.

Magon and other PLM organizers were arrested, this time in the U.S.

Still, "Magonista" meetings drew increasing numbers of Mexican-Americans. PLM organizers emphasized the connection between working-class members in both countries as a key to anti-capitalist, anti-nationalist resistance.

During World War I, Flores Magon attempted to rally the Mexican-Americans of the Southwest against the "fight between the world's leading imperialists".

In 1912, 1916, and 1918, Ricardo Flored Magon, his brother Enrique, and Librado Rivera, all PLM organizers, were brought to trial for their political beliefs. For their beliefs and for the acts of others who they were associated with, all thress became political prisoners.

Ricardo Flores Magon was imprisoned by the U.S. authorities in 1905, 1907, 1912, and then in 1918 he was sentenced to 20 years.

In Mexico, PLM and Zapatista rebellions continued until 1919, but they were unable to defeat the state forces. However, in 1922 an anarchist trade union, the CGT, was formed in Mexico City as a continuation of anarchist struggle.

2/10/01

The house is in a flurry the morning of our departure. All of us except roommate Craig are leaving for Tucson.

Clay and I are headed there as the first leg of our trip. My best friend is there too, having just biked there with other comrades from Bellingham.

After coffee and a bizarre impromptu photo shoot where everyone has their picture taken wearing the AC/DC blue denim vest, we all part our respective ways.

We spend only a few days in Tucson, but they're nice. I see my oldest friend, Cat, and the bike gang she rode down with. Naturally we go to BICAS, the community bike library/ reconstruction/ junkpile. We watch an inspirational videotape of Greek anarchists throwing molotov cocktails at banks while the cops meander about uselessly. We see some of Clay's friends, including ones who are hosting the "Schools for Chiapas" caravan as they prepare to depart for Mexico as well. They're heading down for what is referred to as the Zapatour. They go to accompany the Zapatistas going to Mexico City to drum up popular support, and to see whether the newly-elected president, Vicente Fox, will be dialoguing with them, or massacring them. Folks from all over, like the Ya Basta! Italians and like "Schools" are accompanying the Zapatistas on their tour as "insurance" in the hopes that the Mexican government and other assassins may be thwarted from assassinating the EZLN, or Marcos, if there are too many witnesses. Clayton and I consider touring, but in the end we decide we'd rather go live at a community for awhile and help do the day-to-day stuff.

I had been to Mexico only once before. The summer Cat and I hitchhiked from Bellingham to San Diego, we spontaneously went to Tijuana as well. It was a half-assed, haphazard, even frightening experience. Neither of us spoke any Spanish, and we had very little money. I got catcalls, glares, and rude comments made about my blue, green, and purple dreadlocks, my septum ring, and both of us had a special knack for doing exactly the wrong thing in the wrong places.



RICARDO
FLORES
MAGON



Ricardo Flores Magon, a Mexican anarchist, was born in 1873 and in 1900, he and his brother founded "Regeneracion", a radical paper opposed to the dictatorship of Porfirio Diaz.

In their lifetimes, the Magon brothers served as catalysts for union organizing among farm and industrial workers.

At a time of fiery labor unrest in the United States, in 1906 Ricardo Flores Magon founded the Mexican Liberal Party. The PLM advocated economic nationalism, political freedom inside Mexico, international working-class solidarity, and the eight-hour day. They called for revolution against Diaz.

Magon went into exile in the U.S. after his second prison sentence. Unfortunately, his life as a revolutionary was to be frequently punctuated by prisons.

In the U.S. he met Emma Goldman, and partly from her influence he moved away from reformism and became an anarchist.

The Mexican Revolution broke out in 1910, largely inspired by the PLM. Large areas of land were expropriated by peasants and major towns and rural areas were liberated. In the south the warrior Emiliano Zapata leading a peasant army adopted the

PLM's slogan, Land and Liberty

For instance, we went to a strip club. Men whose jobs were to lure customers into the dark lairs of sin, argued viciously between each other over our curious patronage. These irritating escorts proceeded to lurk around us, going so far as to pull up chairs and open our beer bottles. Aerosmith was blasting so loud I couldn't even think, and I recall some sort of stage that resembled a boxing ring where two mostly-naked women were in contortions over some man. In the background there were sleazy-looking men up to no good, and womyn who wore excessive amounts of make-up and very little clothing. At least we had the sense to leave.

Cat and I hung out with the Tijuana street kids as they spanged pesos to buy Tecate and cheap street tacos. The common language between us and the TJ kids was punk, and they rambled off lists of bands as we nodded and smiled, or shook our heads.

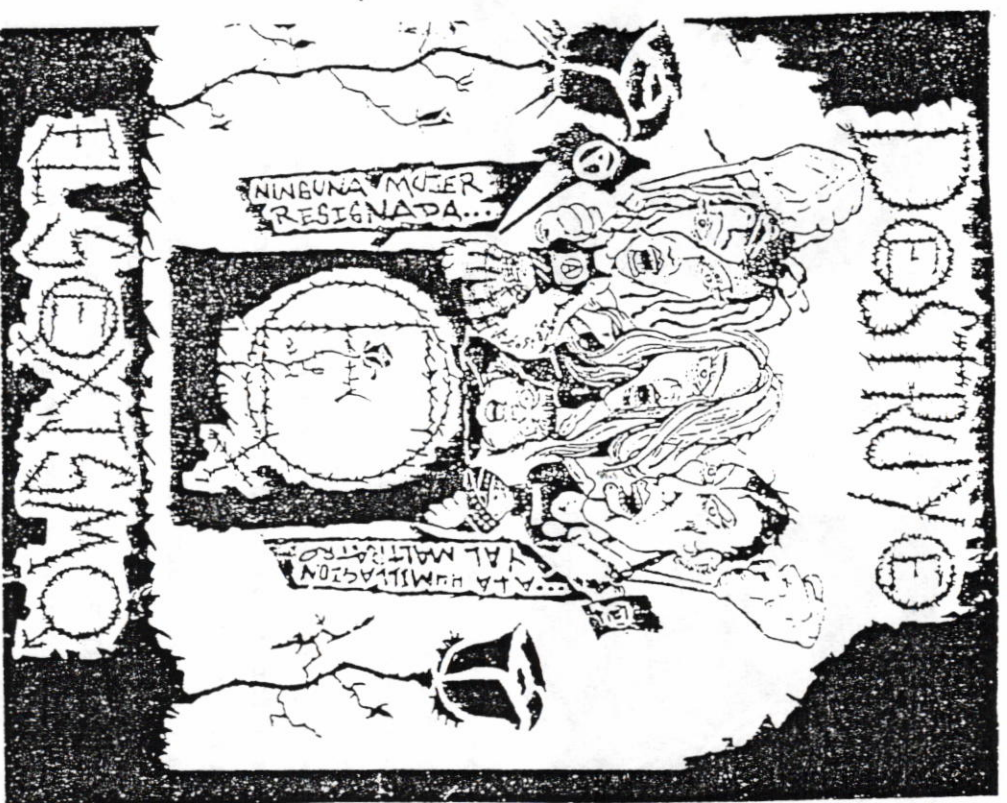
"Crudos? Black Flag? Crass? Subsistencia? Misfits?" and so on.

We rented a room that was painted the sickliest shade of sea foam green, with a pink kitchen area. Cockroaches pranced up and down the cryptic sticky stains and smears on the wall and stove.

We joked about how the place made us feel like we should decorate with lace doilies and Jesus figurines, and then we should reproduce. My dreads began to smell like fish and Tijuana water. We watched Beavis and Butt-head with Spanish dub, somewhere.

Street vendors aggressively dragged me into their dens, and a pharmacist asked Cat about her tits.

The whole thing feels like some strange dream now.



We are the machinery and we are the monkeywrenches. We have but to follow our hearts towards real freedom and to throw off the programming that tells us that nothing can be changed; that apathy and cynicism are the best solutions to living in a world where everyone is either a slave or a master.

We have everything to lose if we don't fight for it; we have a whole world to gain if we do.

So, see ya in the streets, in the forests, and wherever else there's wrongs to right.

Love and anarchy,

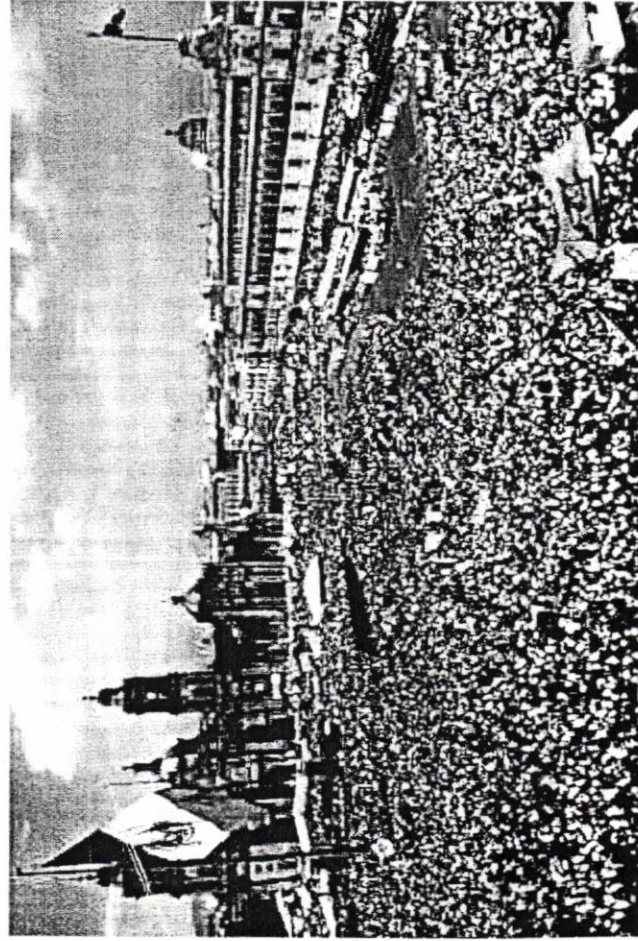
Puck

-From the northeast mountains of Taos, New Mexico
-March 20, 2002

But I can't deny the relief I feel at being "home", sort of. Home is where I can heal my troubled guts with organic herbs and dumpstered produce; home, in my current sleepless, fickle state of mind, is where I can get soy milk in my coffee and free garlic bagels at the very least. Home is where I can squat, pillage, bike, and publish zines. Home may be the most fucked-up country there is, with so many broken promises, so many prisoners, so much military power, fascist cops, millionaires and corporate headquarters, but at least home is where I know what I'm up against. Here is where I have the opportunity and the responsibility to bring down the beast I know. Like the Zapatistas say:

"You want to see a real Zapatista? Then look in the mirror.

Don't join our movement; create your own. Come here and support us, but then go home for your own revolution."



Tens of thousands of EZLN supporters at the Zócalo in Mexico City - photo from Indy Media Chapas

2/14/01

So we're at the bus station in Nogales at ten p.m. It's dirty and noisy and confusing. There are different booths where ticket vendors for different bus lines hawk tickets going to various cities. Bored looking men smoke rolled cigarettes and munch on gross fried food in paper trays as they wait under buzzing florescent lights. Clayton and I have no pesos, so we walk over to the mega-grocery store/flea market and use the ATM. Already my head is spinning from the language problems.

We end up with two one-way tickets to Mexico City. The tickets are surprisingly expensive at \$130 U.S. per ticket. The train we had been set on taking, which I tried many times to look up on the internet, has been out of service for years. Surprise, surprise.

The bus trip is thirty freaking hours. The only bus available, being first class, is way nicer than a Greyhound. Plush seats seem to lean back further, and the rows are dotted with multiple televisions that play bad movies from a few years ago's blockbuster lineup. The bus is strangely serene. The usual crowd of wingnuts, crackpots, broke kids, and other wonderfully unsavory Greyhound types are noticeably and remorsefully absent. There's a family wearing all nylon jumpsuits. Single men slouch into their window seats and prepare for a long slumber. I follow suit.

There are a few stops along the way. In the middle of the night, or maybe early morning, somewhere in the northern part of Mexico, the bus halts and I stagger off, looking at the black silhouettes of massive palm trees against a dark blue sky. It's just the side of a highway that we've pulled over at, and along the wide road trash blows like mini tornadoes, chasing occasional cars. There's a few stands set up like in an outdoor market. I enter one that has lots of fruit, and gape sleepily at things. There's plenty of bags of chips encased in shiny rainbow-colored metallic foil with cryptic cartoon

characters pushing the product. "Muy Sabroso!" they assure potential ingestors.

I finally settle on a large bottle of water and a banana. Two womyn are standing at the cash register, talking. I'm aware that they're staring, but they have smiles on their faces and look friendly enough. I must look funny to them with my ripped-up, patched pants, spiky hair and septum ring. They watch me and chatter back and forth.

I hand them my water. Feeling awkward, I croak:

"Cuento cuesta?"

It takes a few times of them repeating for me to understand. Sheepishly, I hand over ten pesos.

"De donde eres?" one womyn inquires.

Where am I from?

"Arizona, de Estados Unidos," I answer.

The womyn seems unsatisfied. She says something to the other womyn, and then tries again:

"Cheen-a?"

I'm confused until the womyn pulls her fingers into vicious slants with her fingers and flattens her face with her palms.

"Cheen-a!" the other echoes.

Cheen-a. China.

Startled, I manage, "No." as I leave as quickly as I can, now awake.

No one's made that face at me since elementary school, but in the next few months, it would become almost commonplace. All of a sudden, a whole decade, 9,000 miles around the country, and countless affirmations of my life and myself mean nothing. I'm nine years old again, fat, pimply, and antisocial. But worse yet, my wrongness has a label. It isn't who I am; it's what I look like to the white kids in California, and then in Acton, Massachusetts.

"You're Chinese, aren't you," they sing like a curse as they make nonsense words and ugly Chink faces.

One punk kid takes me on a tour.

"Here is where people sleep when they come into town for protests," he points out a whole other building.

"Once these were factories," he elaborates. "During the big earthquake in the 1980s, the doors of the buildings were locked. The workers couldn't get out. The owners came and unlocked the doors, but only to pull their machines out. Lots of people died here and elsewhere. After the earthquake, homeless people and people who lost their families came here and were angry. They occupied the buildings and refused to leave. The police eventually stopped coming. Now it's a community center, and people can stay here for free."

We can't stay since we have to leave and catch a bus....

More buses, more buses, and then a plane, and another bus, and suddenly, it's six in the morning in Nogales, Mexico. We're in a blinding bus station and the sun is coming up, the sky streaked with pink and yellows. It's a few days until May.

We board a white van headed for Tucson, Arizona. There's only one other guy in there, besides the driver. The roads get better the second we enter the United States. The houses are bigger, cleaner, more homogenized cells of wealth. The crumbling mom and pop shops give way to Taco Bells, McDonald's, and Rite Aids. More trees and ornaments are planted alongside the highway, shamelessly squandering greatly-needed water. Then the true welcome to America: an INS checkpoint. Two border patrol officers peek in and this time, they wave us through after a brief questioning. With Aryan faces the color of pink meat products, Texas accents and full fascist regalia (gun included), these racist murderers are to Latin Americans crossing into the U.S., what the Statue of Liberty must have been like for 18th century immigrants arriving at Ellis Island. Only the armed guards and their infrared binoculars, their helicopters and their razor wire are more honest that misnamed statue, whose upraised torch would be more evocative as a molotov cocktail wielded in defense of those "weary, huddled masses".

4/23/01

It's my twenty-first birthday in Mexico City, and we make efforts to see the Anarchist Library and to our delight, it's open!

The couple who work as caretakers there seem like they're in their late twenties. The guy picks through piles of international and Mexican anarchist and anarcho-feminist papers for us to take home. Although I really can't read them, I rummage through files full of old "Regeneracion"s, Ricardo Flores Magon's publication. There are anarchist encyclopedias from the early 1900's in color and in hardback.

After closing, we all go to see a movie. Four of us squeeze into one of those demonic little green-and-white taxi VW bugs, and the driver darts menacingly around until we reach our destination. It's raining and I guess that all things considered, I shouldn't be surprised that the rain actually burns my skin.

"Manuel" is the movie we go see. It's French Canadian, subtitled in Spanish. The story is about a little rebellious boy who runs away from his authoritarian baker father and from school. After squatting with unsavory mullet-wearing teens in leather jackets for awhile and petty stealing, he finds an old shoemaker who once fought in the Spanish Civil War as an anarchist militant.

The old man befriends the boy and encourages proper disrespect for authority, and teaches him to read Kropotkin. It's a great movie. The crowd that lingers after the show are dreadlocked, patched-up Mexico City punks.

"Do you want to come to our squat?" they ask.

So we take the Metro and walk to what looks like a warehouse of some sort. There are a few buildings around a parking lot; they're painted and gathered in the parking lot area there are some kids spinning unlit fire chains. I try them, but to my apprehension, the kids tell me they use gasoline, even to breathe fire sometimes, when they can't find white gas.

Inside one building there's a kitchen area where some Italian Ya Basta! types are visiting and talking with locals. We eat some rice and hang out for awhile.

At home I scowl into the mirror and then into the television and fashion magazines my mother has. I glare at all the glossy pictures of skinny, happy, white people in their airbrushed beauty, and I tear out their eyes and blacken their perfect pale faces with dark mustaches and blacked-out teeth.

It's like that fat fuck of a spoiled Aryan monster put it in third grade as he pushed my chair over with me in it:

"I don't like you. And, you're Chinese."

I slink into my bus seat. I feel like I got slapped in the face. Why? I wonder. Is it my fault? Is it theirs?

I am the daughter of railroad workers who lived and worked and were killed like slaves. I am from people who worked the canneries, the sweatshops, the mills, the farms, the convenience stores, the laundromats. My people have been run out of their neighborhoods, relocated by white colonists when they managed to own land, or they were burned and lynched for just being Chinese, or for being poor, or occasionally, for being prosperous.

Six generations and still the parents of my friends ask with feigned nonchalance, "So, where is your mother from?"

They don't like that I answer: "South Bronx."

"Your father?" they ask.

"Boston."

Further back still. "Your grandparents?"

"The Bronx."

And so on.

I'm sick of being told who I am. I was with this boy once, who was a fire-spinner, juggler, unicycle rider traveller sort. I thought he was okay until he said:

"I've never been with someone who isn't white before." And then he got this weird smile on his face, like a smug, self-congratulatory grin, and he affirmed: "I like it. You're very...exotic."

Reduced to a race, again.

China. That enormous, mysterious, distant land of kung-fu, Confucius, Taoism, an ancient wholistic medicine tradition, the shirveled, bound feet of women, girl infanticide, the I-Ching, rice and soybeans, and Communist totalitarianism with neoliberal policies, preceeded by dynasty after fucking dynasty of impoverished peasants and disgusting emperors. How to answer to that? Some people will tell me that I'm Chinese- they say it like it's my responsibility to be as Chinese as they are free of responsibility to have to be any certain way- American Whiteness is an apparently blank slate, free of the history of genocide and betrayal in this colonized, stolen piece of land that is the U.S. Those white people, who pretend like they're so proud of their far-back European heritage, are free from responsibility for both the past and the present, whereas by my brown skin they expect I have to carry China's legacy around, to represent for a place I've never been and for people whose language and memory and culture is not mine. To them, I'll always be "disobedient", or "nice", but whatever, I'll be "Chinese" first. Curious and exotic, slightly inferior but marketable enough, so long as "Chinese" isn't considered a threat to the White ruling class.

China; it's not mine. I have my hands full with the patriarchy, the white supremacy, the military and all of the rest of the brutality in the country I've always lived in: the United States. I'm not an American; I'm not a nationalist; I'm not Chinese either. I'm an Asian-American, brown womyn anarchist.

The struggles of my foremothers have been for a dignified living, for a degree of cultural and economic autonomy within their communities in Chinese-American New York and Boston, and for a more just, better tomorrow. Those are the struggles I'll answer to. Those are the ancestors I'll call to when I need to.

I had thought that being brown in Mexico would be a help. After all, who wants to admit being from the biggest terrorist nation in the world? Instead, I re-discovered white supremacy and the legacy of the conquistadors.

We return to Oventic in time to go to the dance party though. It's the best dance party I've been to yet.

Inside a big barn with the face of Emiliano Zapata painted on the doors, perhaps a hundred people are sitting on haystacks or boogying down to the music of marimbas, keyboards, and tubas.

They're doing a line dance like a circling snake when I enter; a tall European womyn with tattoos following a short Tzotzil man half her height who's wearing a huge straw hat and poncho; he's followed by a string of kids visiting from Mexico City wearing soccer uniforms, and they by the white-haired caretaker, and so on.

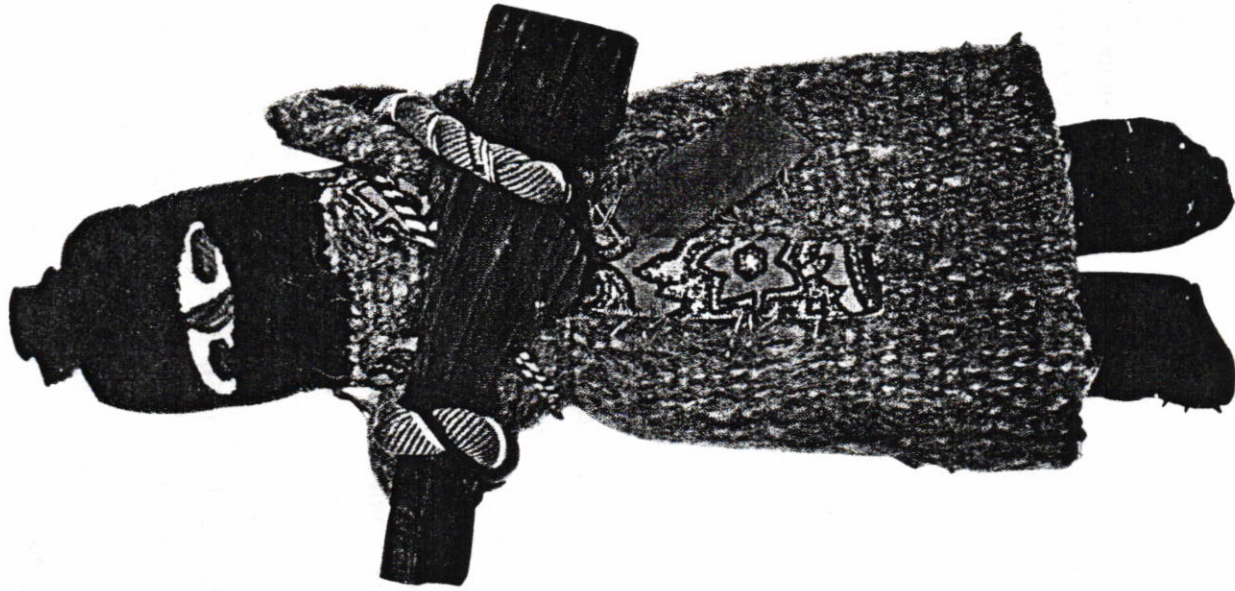
The line dance turns into what we begin to refer to as the "Zapatista Shuffle", where individuals sway slowly from side to side in time to the music that always sounds cheery and a little off-key, shuffling their feet almost imperceptibly. This is how the Zapatistas dance.

The hippie guy from the U.S. who does things on his laptop and who teaches at the EZLN language school for supporters, is rocking out in a corner by himself, long hair, arms and legs flailing as a circle of indigenous girls watch with giggling fascination.

The festivities ended around midnight.

In the morning I go back to the EZLN clinic as a patient this time. My fever has returned. Clayton and I wait on the bench outside the office, and as we look at the room of pharmaceuticals, we remember how when the EZLN stormed San Cristobal de las Casas, one of the first things they did was raid the pharmacies. Rad. I'm no fan of Western medicine and pharmaceuticals, but I can see how a jar of antibiotics can make the difference between living and dying from intestinal infections or a fever, as children here often do.

Although there is a small kitchen to the side of the clinic where herbal medicines are cooked up, the Zapatista doctor, a young indigenous womyn wearing traditional blouse and skirt gives me Tylenol PM, which I learn is what most people are given for most things. Later she gives me a honey-based syrup for my throat, too. Shortly afterwards, we leave Chiapas, this time heading for north. It's close to May now, and our money is running out.



The police and military are present but they are in the background. There is tension like spiderwebs, but in the end, the EZLN boards their bus, their hordes of international supporters in close pursuit (it's a caravan, after all), and slowly, the Zocalo clears out without obvious incident or clash with the authorities.

But first, Mexico City.

2/16/01

I'm at some sort of concrete cave on the side of the street, where one can get medium-grade beer, wheat-puff deep-fried treats, and several limes for about \$5 U.S.

Our new friend, a Mexico City crusty, escorted us here. We went to the Biblioteca de Social Reconstruir, the infamous anarchist library, and just like infoshops in the States, it was closed during open hours. Gabriel, the punker who had long dreadlocks, was reading a H.B. Lovcraft book in the hallway, waiting for his friend to open the place.

We talked about grindcore, the Zapatistas, and anarchism in Mexico. Lots of halting translations, patient listening, and much guessing marks the conversation.

"Como se dice... 'Death Row'?"

I like Mexico City more than Los Angeles, anyway. It's a more honest dystopia, set among a backdrop of old, crumbling cathedrals, narrow stone streets, and brown, smog-choked skies. An ancient-looking man with white hair sits on a blanket along the street, hawking toenail clippers, plastic saxophones, and motor oil. He looks like he's been there since the Revolution of 1910.

Hordes of stray dogs lurk at every street vendor's garbage heap. The smells of inadequate sewer systems, the smells of charring animal flesh, industrial pollutants from unidentified smokestacks, automotive toxins, and an unplaceable general gnarliness combines into a distinctive perfume.

The streets are like highways, with ten lanes or more on the big streets. At least half the charging and swerving cars on the roads are these green and white VW bugs; these ferocious little machines seem to aim for pedestrians.

Mexico City is the most populous city in the world, and the second most polluted one. (Athens, Greece is the most polluted.)

The Metro is the subway system here. It is possibly the best, most orderly one I've seen yet. It takes you everywhere, packed in throngs of other humans pressed so tightly against you you can hardly breathe. From up high it would look like a long robotic

snake slinking through dark, intestinal tunnels in the belly of this megapolis, spewing forth people like flies into little chaotic pools of activity as its orifices open at a stop.

2/17

Oaxaca City, Oaxaca is in southern Mexico, just north of Chiapas. We end up staying in Oaxaca for almost a month. It's a peaceful, sunny town compared to Mexico City, much smaller and less confusing.

To our surprise, there are many tourists here. I am astounded by these wealthy white foreigners who strut the streets in brand new tourist clothes and the infamous camera around the neck. "Rob me," they seem to say. They come to impoverished regions of the earth where their designer clothes were made in sweatshops or their imported crops were grown on stolen indigenous land, and then they have the nerve to further denigrate and humiliate Mexicans into having to court tourism for "the economy". Whose economy? It's certainly not the rural indigenous Mayans who benefit or profit when tourist buses deliver sunburnt white people to ancient homesites either abandoned for some reason or stolen from them by the government that advertises on its website "Maya del Oro" (Maya of Gold) while pretending the Zapatistas, a largely indigenous movement, does not exist except when they are being executed in their villages by the military.

However, it is easy to see why people would want to be here. The weather is seventy degrees or so in the middle of February; the food is traditional indigenous and consists of such treats like mole, a cocoa/chile sauce, or a drink made of squash flowers, cocoa, corn, and other things, and tlayudas, huge, flat tortillas. Oaxaca is a small city that's large enough to find whatever it may be that you're looking for. There's plenty of art galleries, museums and hotels to court the tourists, too.

We had missed the Zapatour homecoming in Oventic on April 1. I heard it was great; it was packed, and there was a dance.

We did get to see the Zapatour in the Zocalos in both Oaxaca and in San Cristobal de las Casas.

In Oaxaca the Zocalo was packed. Brand new graffiti went up over the old graffiti, which had gotten hastily splashed over with obtrusive white coats. "Viva EZLN!", "Tierra y Libertad!", and the ever-present anarchy sign on the bank.

As far as the eye could see, there were anxious, excited, and curious people milling about. A few well-painted banners were hanging in expectation of the arrival of the world's most media-friendly guerilla army. Media people set up their cameras and children ran around, involved in mischief. A few opportunistic vendors were selling t-shirts screenprinted with Emiliano Zapata and Subcomandante Marcos, and other trinkets like buttons, handkerchiefs, and of course, those little Zapatista dolls that the indigenous womyn and children sell so effectively.

From the arrival of the EZLN until their departure, the Zocalo became one giant mosh pit. Waves of motion would ripple through the sea of bobbing heads, camera flashes, raised fists, and upturned attentive brown faces. I was taken aback by the fact that I could see pretty well at my five-foot-two; many of the people gathered here were shorter than me! Certainly, there has been no silence in reporting concerning the diminutive statures of many of the Zapatista Indian warriors who barely clear five feet. Shouting reverberated all around like a beach ball hit from one person in a crowd to another:

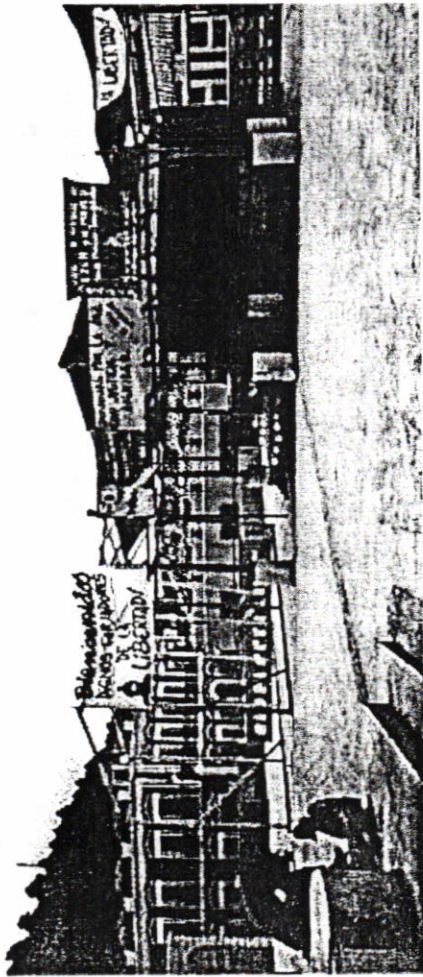
"ZAPATA VIVE!"

"LA LUCHA SIGUE SIGUE!"

Like a steady drumbeat until the Zapatistas speak. And then it's like punctuation.

"Zapata vive vive!"

The EZLN enter the stage single file, wearing their ski masks, traditional indigenous hats with the streamers on them, wool pullovers, and of course Marcos has his distinctive pipe and bandana. They unfurl a Mexican flag to the cheering of the crowd. (Our Oaxacan anarchist friend shrugs)



Town square in San Cristóbal de las Casas before a demo

IN SAN CRISTÓBAL DE LAS CASAS, WE MEET A

group of British supporters who rent a house down the street. Richard, a charismatic man of about fifty or so, chain-smokes and swears constantly. He's part of the Easton Cowboys, a futbol team who originally became a futbol team in order to gain admittance into Chiapas when things were crazy and activists were turned away if they were overt. The Easton Cowboys did in fact play futbol with the Zapatistas, and they even expanded their repertoire to include playing cricket in Compton, California, where they raised enough money to install water systems in rural Zapatista villages who wanted such things.

Now they were here to install the pipes. A side project they do is to catalog and compile information about traditional indigenous herbal and healing remedies. Clay and I want to work with them, however, they need no help. It's a lesson though, that one can come down here and do really badass shit if you plan it and know what you're doing; otherwise it'll just be more coffee, basketball and reading at the dank supporter cabin.

Our first day in Oaxaca we meet two punk girls from Portland who invite us to stay with them. We do. They're renting a concrete room that's divided into to sections by a wall. It costs \$40 U.S. a month. There's a concrete bathroom shared with neighbors with a series of toilet stalls that don't flush well, and there's a huge stone sink that's filled with water (no running water) to wash clothes and hands.



Elizabeth has an altar with items acquired at local herb/ magic shops. One is a candle with a picture of garlic on it; it says: "Ajo Macho". The altar could be one reason out of many that the landlady dislikes us all so virulently. The landlady seems to spend the greater part of each day doing laundry out in the courtyard; scrubbing, rinsing, washing clothes in another huge stone sink. As she does this she

blasts Mexican pop music louder than bad nightclubs.

Kelly's been hookin up. As the uncommon white girl who's into Oaxacan culture, hip hop, punk, and other seemingly machismo Mexican things, she breaks Oaxacan hearts left and right. Tagged down the street from her house is a scribble of a smiley face with freckles and two braids. Written below is "Kelley Love".

But it's for the Oaxacan breakdancer with "Player" (yes, in English) tattooed in a heart on his arm that Kelly falls for. At some earlier time he ran away into the United States and lived in L.A.

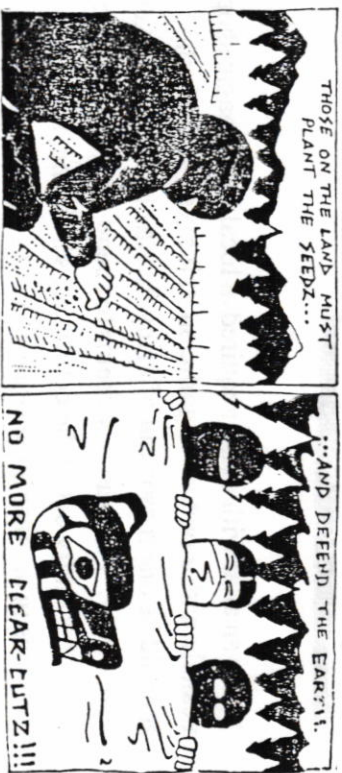
Perhaps that's where he got his "Player" tattoo. Now, at nineteen or so he's back in Oaxaca and he smokes crack. His parents are very interested in marrying him off to Kelly.

"Then your children will be whiter," they pressure him to impress her.

Kelly takes it in stride, and eats dinner with the family.

At her place some other day, "Player" is cuddling with some other fine young thing and her hands are down his baggy pants. Kelly seems not to mind as she works on her latest art piece.

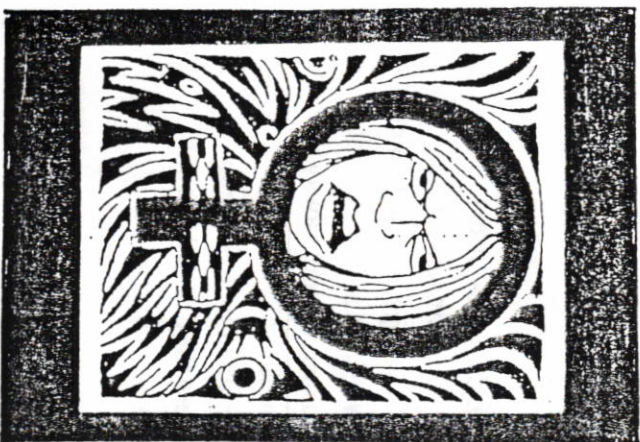
There are other kids in Oaxaca who don't shoot dope or smoke crack. One of them is a quiet, thoughtful anarchist kid probably around twenty. He wears beat-up clothes with a "Sin Dios" patch or two loosely safety-pinned on. He talks about how the Zapatistas are acting as reformers with guns, not really as revolutionaries since their current strategy for social change is contingent on having the Cocopa law, a law already signed in 1996, enacted, and also guaranteed in the constitution.



And how at odds is that with our anarchist, anti-capitalist, D.I.Y. ethics that we live by when things are more familiar? Shit; I don't pay rent whenever I can; I steal and dumpster food and give it away, and now I'm paying for hotels, eating in restaurants and supporting a disgusting tourist industry that fosters international master-servant relationships between me and the people who work the kinds of jobs I would be working in the U.S! By my own standards, they ought to be robbing me blind! But it's far from justice that foreign womyn are harassed as sexual objects by locals; it's not even revenge, since Lydia is hardly a conquistador...it's just fucked. It sucks.

It's a terrible predicament. No one wins, and money reigns supreme.

We leave shortly afterwards.



Lydia and Nick head back to Xela, and Clay and I to Chiapas.

Then we find the locals' bar. A table of loudly laughing, drunk-as-fuck guys are ordering another pitcher. We sit down and enjoy the corny salsa music and the fact that the bar/ restaurant looks like somebody's living room and probably is.

After two beers, Lydia's face gets weird, and she says she wants to go.

The guys at the next table are making faces at her, and obscene gestures. I'm pissed and feel disgusted and helpless. If we were in the States it'd be different; we'd just go and tell them to fuck off, kick 'em in the groin after a good verbal berate, optimally. But we're in this foreign land where we don't belong. Lydia's angry but she doesn't want to confront them because of feeling guilty for being a tourista, an invader. Nick doesn't want to get dragged into a macho fistfight which would inevitably happen if someone confronted the men, who're drunk beyond reason.

So we leave. But the situation follows us. It's been building for sometime, after all. Something just doesn't feel right about this all...The industry of tourism is one of the most disgusting and crude ways that class warfare and white supremacy manifest themselves today. The Third World as industrial site, as fields for agrobusiness export, as raw materials provider-everything from timber to servitude....and as the Rich Man's Playground. A marketplace for little souvenirs, cheap, "exotic" whores, and commodified "culture". Humiliation on top of degradation.

And we're in the middle of it. Clay and I came down here as Zapatista supporters, as did Lydia a year ago, but here in Guatemala we're just more gringos vacationing in a land of extreme poverty, where just a few years ago (before 1996) there was open warfare against the campesinos (peasant farmers) suspected of being "Leftists" waged by the military and government. The blood spilled everywhere; thousands have been "disappeared"; Rigoberta Menchu escaped from the ashes to write her incredible memoirs of rebellion, dignity and survival....And we honor her and her people by staying in hotels and interacting with people like they're sellers and we're buyers?



The Cocopa law grants indigenous rights and recognizes indigenous culture, including the right to sovereignty. However, the communiques issued about re-starting the dialogues for peace with the government are vocal about their distrust of politicians, and there is a strong emphasis on "peace" only with justice and with dignity. So although dialoguing with Presidente Fox is something that the Zapatistas are interested in doing, they are not without their conditions.

The conditions the EZLN have established in order to re-open the dialogues with the government are:

1. Release all EZLN political prisoners.
2. Close all the military bases (at least those which encircle the Zapatista communities).
3. Recognize the COCOPA agreement signed in 1996.

But Vicente Fox, the president, will neither completely meet nor openly refuse to meet the conditions for negotiation. One of his first acts as president was to table a law on indigenous rights in the Congress. He supported the freeing of 18 out of the over 100 Zapatista political prisoners, and he closed down 3 out of 7 military bases (out of 200 bases total in the state).

Yet scummy he is. He's a politician, after all, and he sure acts like it. New setbacks abound daily in the media that Fox has allowed his administration to threaten to arrest EZLN if they leave Chiapas, and his administration spreads new rumors constantly, like the one where the negotiations will not happen if the Zapatistas wear masks. The latest news is that Fox has forbidden the International Committee of the Red Cross to accompany the march to Mexico City. Which sounds eerie, almost like an open threat. Why are health care attendants forbidden to tend to the Zapatistas should "something" happen to them on their journey?

It is strange to be in the country where there is immense amounts of support for the EZLN, yet there is also so much stupid shit like sexism, racism, tourism, and ultra-sensationalistic television that puts Jerry Springer to shame. The evening news has a special helicopter section where gory car crashes are examined in great detail from overhead. Dismembered human bodies regularly decorate the front pages of news magazines, side by side to pictures of Subcomandante Marcos, the spokesperson who the media has isolated as a celebrity and therefore, the only Zapatista worth talking about. The papers make the march out to be like a wrestling match between Marcos and Presidente Fox, just like the "Lucha Libre" wrestling matches where contestants dress up in wonderfully tasteless sequined and spandex masks and suits.

However, there is also "El Proceso", the lefty paper that quotes Noam Chomsky as a headline. Even through all the bullshit in the press, it is evident that the Zapatour is moving through Mexico, and people are stoked. But it's really hard for me to understand politics and revolution here.

For almost a century the PRI, a political party, has maintained a virtual dictatorship in Mexico. Everyone knows the elections have been openly rigged, too. This last election in which Vicente Fox

LIVINGSTON, GUATEMALA

"Amigos! Welcome to paradise! Would you like to buy some marijuana?" spoken in English.

We look around warily, but the Black man at the dock really is speaking to us, strange as it seems.

Our destination, picked out beforehand by Lydia and Nick, turns out to be the very unlike the rest of Guatemala. It's a Caribbean peninsula accessible only by a short boat ride from the mainland and from Belize, which it resembles more, I am told. As can be surmised through the ill-fitting, European name and its geography, Livingston suffered at the hands of such evil bastards like Dole and United Fruit. To this day, the population is the resulting mixture of indigenous and African. Garufino, they're called. Many who I encountered spoke English very well, and they have their own language and culture separate from the rest of Guatemala, which is mostly indigenous.

It feels like a tropical island. Palm trees belong here, unlike those emphysemic and tormented specimens on the sides of freeways in L.A. They even have coconuts. Everything looks amazing and bright green and jungly. The ocean is a magnificent turquoise blue, and there are dolphins out here, so I hear.

Clayton and I go to the water. For being a freakin island, a beach is rather hard to get to.

It's suspiciously warm and frighteningly brown. Plastic bottles, styrofoam, soggy toilet paper and seaweed float out with me. The water is shallow as well; well over a mile from shore, it comes up to my waist still. The experience is discomforting: I feel like I'm playing in a sewer. But I brave it. After all, I saw little kids playing in here as their mothers lounge on the sand riddled with cigarette butts.

None of us expected Livingston to be so touristy and fucked-up. Or that we'd be tourists.

On the bus to the coast, Clayton befriends a group of Guatemalan migrant workers. They are headed for the docks. There's seven of them who share a small bedroom somewhere as they save up enough to move to the next job, perhaps farmwork. They're friendly to Clay (I'm asleep) but regard him with some amount of reserve.

"We've never met a white person who would talk to us before," one says.

"If we go visit you in Arizona, will you employ us?" another asks.

Clayton explains that he can't employ anyone since he doesn't own a business or have money; that he works as a dishwasher.

The men look at each other in disbelief.

"Well, you'll be able to find us jobs, right?"

All gringos have businesses, after all. How else could they afford to travel when other people have to work?



assumed the presidency, the vote was "not so much for Fox as against the PRI", as El Proceso put it. Fox is of the PRD, the other party. But all that's just a shuffling around in the same small, inbred pool of elites in Mexico whose real job is to defer to the U.S. corporate government and to maintain the proper amount of desperation and poverty in Mexico to keep foreign investors rich.

In Mexico City there is a demonstration (manifestation, it's called in Spanish) every day at least. We saw taxi drivers on strike angrily chanting at the Zocalo. We saw peasants with their straw hats, and women in shawls, congeal around the Governmental Palace in Oaxaca, banging on the latched doors. There were even student strikers no older than thirteen. They acted like brats on a school field trip, but they were striking for no tuition even as they flirted and tormented each other.

In the Zocalo in Oaxaca, a group of women and their ragged children live and sleep in the shadows of the governmental palace buildings and the bourgeois restaurants open for tourists. Their husbands have been imprisoned years ago for having been suspected of being supporters of the EPR, a Maoist insurgent group that, we are told, kill(ed) cops and blow up government buildings in a peculiarly authoritarian, Communist sort of way.

These women and their children weave baskets out of plastic wire, and sell them. They also collect donations for their imprisoned husbands and send the small, barefoot ones out to tourists with a flyer stating their case and a collection jar.

This is life as usual?

The anarcho-punk scene in Oaxaca is pretty rad though. They have weekly meetings and distribute a pamphlet: "What is anarcho-punk?" While we were there they had a small protest in the Zo'calo. At least a dozen or two kids with mohawks and other punk 'dos, who looked really young (from twelve to eighteen or so) gathered around demonstrating against the World Economic Forum meeting in Cancun. They had a little bonfire and took turns shouting into a

megaphone, but this being Mexico and being that threat is interpreted on a much different scale than it is as demonstrations in the U.S., the cops were nowhere to be found. Nonetheless, the protest dispersed quickly and did no obvious economic damage.

But the most amazing thing about the Oaxacan anarchists is their graffiti presence. Every night, or so it seems, they hit the town. Anarchy signs decorate the banks nightly even though by day the spray paint is covered over with yet another coat of paint.

Grffiti supporting the EZLN and Marcos appears on the government palace buildings, and all over the Zocalo. There is even "FREE MUMIA" in English to reach the tourists on a busier tourist street.

"F26" began appearing all over one day, and soon we found out it meant the protest on the World Economic Forum meeting in Cancun, Mexico.

We thought about going, but we didn't in the end because: It would cost a lot of money, even in pesos; We did not want to go to Cancun, even for a protest; and we didn't want to get shot, imprisoned, hospitalized, or deported before we even make it to Chiapas.

F26 turned out to be bad news. Apparently only around 500 protesters showed up, and when they got there, it was a total police state. There really wasn't much the protesters could do besides hang out in the hot sun, and then at the end of the day, the riot cops suddenly charged them and began wildly beating people. Lots ended up in the hospital; others in prison.

We left for Chiapas shortly afterwards. I looked forward to being out in rebel mountain and jungle villages, to making tortillas, planting corn, learning Spanish, Tzotzil, and Tzeltal (indigenous languages) and building houses.

They told me of the landlord who, upon their move-in, picked up a dead rat off the floor by its tail and threw it off the balcony. Since then they watched it rot across the street, on the neighbor's roof where it landed.

"We keep time by it," Jessica told me. "You know, back when the rat still had fur, and then when the bones started showing..."

While we were there, a huge blast and bang sounded from downstairs. It was followed by shouting and yelling.

Startled, I ducked and hit the deck.

It turned out to be fireworks at midnight.

To get to the hostel we stayed at, you pass the Zocalo, where a modern-looking, gleaming McDonald's looms imperialistically alongside massive gray stone buildings and oppressive concrete churches, amidst feudal poverty and corporate wealth.

Pepsi and Coke is painted on everything.

The rats, the size of small cats, sprint alongside militant cockroaches in shadows as we walk home.

Drunken strangers in the night glare at us or laugh dangerously and mouth greetings or insults.

There's cobblestones peeking through the pavement and there's strange little restaurants that offer pizza "italiano" and "Gringo's Chicken"; there's a strange old stone bridge for pedestrians in the middle of the city that, like everywhere else, is usually dotted with animal fecal matter and bad-smelling cryptic brown puddles.



Passengers are packed in three or more to one of those short seats.

The squawking of bagged-up chickens and disgreaceable infants quell eventually as the rickety old buses bump and grind on mountain roads and through congested cities.

Every jerk sends you and your two or three neighbors into each other's laps and/or baggage.

It's all about sweaty elbows and always seeming to have to pee and the bus stopping frequently while womyn and men outside vend fresh mangoes, peanuts, sodas and popsicles through the cracked-open school bus windows for a quetzal or two.

Bus music buzzing and shouting through it all:

the lush greenery outside

the crumbling cities of stone, dust, and bone

the incredible poor and desperate who at a glimpse, throw out a knowing and defiant brown hand for money from tourists

globalization's most recent victories: a KFC and even a Wal-

Mart in Guatemala

barefoot gas huffers

and English and Spanish schools for the up-and-coming and for tourists.

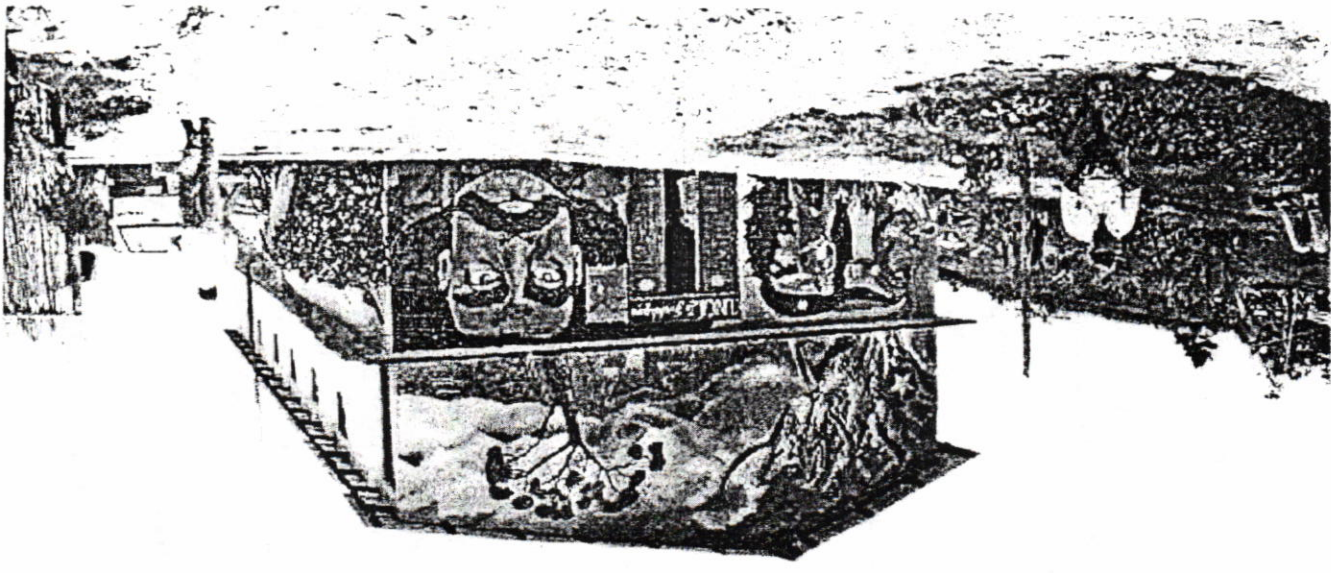
My friend Matt was working at one of those English schools in Xela, or Quetzaltenango for a good wage for there: about \$2 U.S. a day.

With no educational experience to speak of, very little Spanish skills, and the strangest of luck, Matt was living in an old building that had a bar and an English school downstairs, apartments scattered all throughout, and strange thumping noises in the night.

The room was small, and he shared it with his friend, Jessica.

A patio extended from the window and there was barely enough room for three or four people to teeter on that cast iron ledge. We drank the only Guatemalan factory-made beer, Gato ("rooster") and swayed on the perch.

Zapachta health clinic



3/11/01

The Zapatista caravan arrives in Mexico City. The Zocalo saw the largest crowd of people ever to greet the insurgents and their parade.

Subcomandante Marcos gave the following speech to the roaring crowd:

"...From the very beginning, the government has been at our backs.

"Sometimes with artillery helicopters, sometimes with paramilitaries, sometimes with bomber planes, sometimes with war tanks, sometimes with soldiers, sometimes with police, sometimes with offers for the buying and selling of consciences, sometimes with offers of surrender, sometimes with lies, sometimes with strident statements, sometimes with forgetting, sometimes with expectant silences. Sometimes, like today, with impotent silences."

He calls out all of the names of the indigenous people in the land we now know as Mexico.

"We are the mirror for seeing ourselves and for being ourselves.

"Here, no longer embarrassment.

"Here the pride of our being the color of the earth."

"Brother, Sister, Mexico City:

"We are not those who aspire to make themselves in power and then impose the way and the word...

"We are not those who are expecting pardons and handouts from the one who feigns to help, when he is, in reality, buying, and who does not pardon, but humiliates the one who, by merely existing, is a defiance and challenge and claim and demand...

"We are not those who wait, naively, for justice to come from above, when it only comes from below. The liberty which can only be achieved with everyone. The democracy which is all the floors and is fought for all the time...

"Ninety years ago the powerful asked those from below, which Zapata was called:

"With whose permission, Senores?"

The front of the bus has an altar to the plastic or wax image of the Virgen de Guadalupe, decorated with pom-pom streamers and doilies.

Speakers up front are cranked up as loudly as possible, crackling and broadcasting all manner of distinctive, amusing, and offensive music. From salsa to mariachi to top-40 pop hits from the U.S. in 1990.

I can't help but gawk at indigenous men wearing striped red and white pants, elaborate and brilliant ponchos embroidered with loud and beautiful flowers, and flat little straw hats. Why can't more men dress like that?

Indigenous women with long braids and some bright white teeth seem less outrageous with clothing choices.

Taking the bus is like this:

The bus terminal is a dusty parking lot in Huehuetenango. There always seems to be toilet paper everywhere on the ground.

You look for the bus you need to take, and inevitably, you're late and have to run after it, and while running, hoist your backpack up top to some guy who's strapping down luggage on top of the bus at the last minute even as the bus driver's pulling out of the lot. He might be reading one of those pornographic comic books that sell so well at news stands on the sides of the roads all the while.

The cafe is one plastic table and four chairs outside what looks like an abandoned, bombed-out shelter on the side of the dusty main drag.

Piles of rubbish and dirt surround the "dining area".

The "kitchen" is outside; pots and pans over an open fire.

A scrawny dog meanders around the construction materials that decay in the yard.

The girl is seventeen. She's pretty and friendly, clean cut with long hair and a button-up denim shirt and skirt. Very curious about us strange folk, especially fond of Lydia with her European features and her interest in speaking Spanish.

Her mother is just as hospitable. She agrees to cook up the Zapatista coffee we have over her fire pit.

The bathroom is through the rubble that is the interior of the "house", which is missing most of a wall, parts of ceiling, and other important features.

It's a dark hole one needs a flashlight to navigate through; there's water leaking onto the floor-it's ankle high. The sound of trickling water in the pitch-black dark is like being in a sewer.

The shitter flushes, amazingly, and our hostesses are thoughtful enough to hand me the toilet paper beforehand.

"The house is being remodeled," the mother explains, climbing gingerly over a piece of cement wall.

Guatemalan buses are old school buses from North America, dead once and now reincarnated into feats of glory painted in bold, primary colors and re-named things such as "No Fear", then decorated with bootleg, uncopyrighted stickers of the Tazmanian devil or of Nike swooshes.

Inside, racks have been welded above those vinyl and metal framed seats, ever familiar from childhood. Up there is where the bus riders stash their baskets and bags full occasionally of squaking, frenzied chickens.

"And those from below responded, and we respond:

"'With ours.'..."

"The movement, the one the color of the earth, is yours, and because it is yours, it is ours.

"We are rebels because the land is rebel if someone is selling and buying it, as if the land did not exist, as if the color we are of earth did not exist.

"Mexico City:

"We are here. We are here as rebellious color of the earth which shouts:

"Democracy!

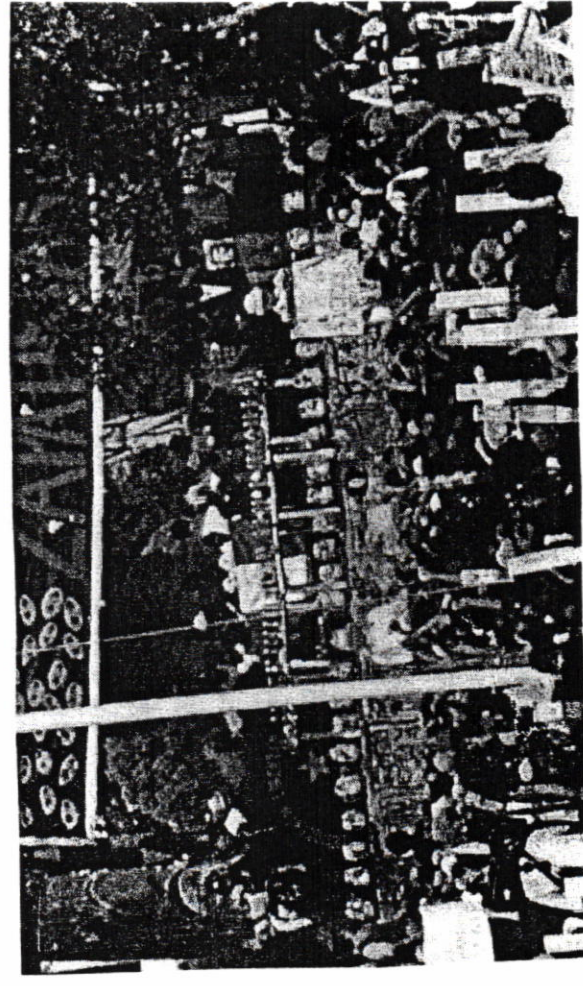
"Liberty!

"Justice!..."

"From the Zo'calo in Mexico City.

"Clandestine Revolutionary Indigenous Committee- General

Command of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation."





First-wave Zapatista woman

January 1, 1994, the first day of the North American Free Trade Agreement, was seized by the masked indigenous woman and men of the Ejercito Zapatista de Liberacion Nacional (Zapatista Army of National Liberation).

With woman and indigenous elders as decision-makers, a bilingual poet for a spokesperson, with bandanas and rubber boots, AK-47s and some rifles carved from wood, the new Zapatista insurgents emerged from ten years of preparation in the jungles. They reclaimed San Cristobal, Ocosingo, and five other municipal areas in southeastern Chiapas, and declared war on the Mexican government. They raised their red and black EZLN flag over San Cristobal, dragged furniture, file cabinets, and documents from out of the Palacio Municipal, and torched them.

A short Indian warrior read out loud the EZLN's program:

"Work, Land, Bread, Health, Education, Democracy, Liberty, Peace, Independence, and Justice".

And thus the struggle for Mexico's liberation that really began in 1492 when the conquistadors invaded, but that last manifested itself through Emiliano Zapata in 1910, has reawakened out of the rumblings in the mountains and the jungles.

A new Zapatista rebellion continues.

The man standing along the narrow road surrounded by street vendors and shantys of commerce offers us his services aggressively:

"Psst! Change your money here! Pesos, dolares, quetzales!" As he fiddles around suspiciously in his coat pockets in the dark.

The motel we go to is the closest one we find.

The lighting inside is dim and weird. It makes the patterns in the carpet dance and scatter like cockroaches.

Men who look like zombies sit in t-shirts and tank tops in the waiting room, stuck to chairs with plastic over the sweat-stained cushions as the television, elevated above like the Virgin de Guadalupe, blares unnoticed.

A young man comes over. His prices for the accommodations rapidly increase at the direction of an unseen old woman who's shrouded behind a yellowed lace curtain behind a cubicle. She scolds his naivete.

"Seven quetzales," he decides at last.

The door, a metal thing with a small slit for a window, does not come with a lock. Clayton has to go outside and find an old man on a blanket who sells cheap padlocks so that we can leave the room.

In the morning the heat and the typical Latin America urban sounds of commerce, pop radio, and traffic wake us in our room in the border town of Llamasia.

The bedraggled lace curtains wilt around the open window we look through to watch the dusty road below, filled with stray dogs, stray kids, street vendors, shoppers, scammers, and decrepit cars coughing up thick fumes.

Still a line of men are waiting for The Man outside the motel. The place seems even less wholesome in daylight.

"Legislators, Ladies and Gentlemen:

"I am an indigenous and zapatista woman...

"My voice came to ask for justice, liberty and democracy for the Indian peoples.

"My voice demanded, and demands, the constitutional recognition of our rights and culture...

"Thank you very much."

Which proves that even such an unworthy audience can't bring down dignity and justice when it shines like that.

Meanwhile at Oventic, the rain moves in. Day after day of wet and cold, of being in the cabin with other bored and frustrated supporters. I crochet a scarf. Clayton and I make a decision to leave for awhile. We can go to the jungles, and see monkeys and ocelots and think of a really cool project to do here, and then come back all inspired, Clay and I reason.

So we go.

GUATEMALA

I ran into Lydia and Nick in San Cristobal de las Casas.

And in less than a day, somehow we were all on a bus heading to Guatemala, with knitting needles, Zapatista books, weird baggage and all.

Guatemala beckons us forth with a hand behind the back-

"So, *amigo*, you say you *wahna* go to the beach!?"

The officials in the official-looking building stamp series of papers in flurries of efficiency and Kafka-esque bureaucracy (papers falling off the counter and into the trash)

as they charge us illegal fees and hand our passports back:

"Bienvenidos a Guatemala...."

...Cabron.

In 2001, San Cristobal de las Casas is still a tiny bohemian city high in the mountains. There isn't as much inspiring anarchist graffiti as in Oaxaca, but there is a noticeable absence of really bad diesel bus exhaust, a surprising slew of vegetarian restaurants (though aimed at tourists, of course), and a feminist bookstore.

Walking around the city I keep hoping to see more signs of open revolt, but it's weird being the tourist who the vegetarian restaurants are marketed to, and Zapatista supporter or not, I look like just another adventurist hippy recreationer to the dozens of indigenous womyn and children who pawn their handmade wares on the street corners and in the courtyards of cafes. I'm just another invader to extract money from. It's an uncomfortable feeling walking around and being reacted to like I'm rich and therefore, only useful economically. I wonder if that's what rich people in the U.S. feel like when they walk around?

I could never get used to the throngs of school-age girls who would run down the street after me with their inexhaustible selection of bracelets made by knotting embroidery thread, repeating in a sad, sing song voice:

"Compralo! Compralo!" (Buy it! Buy it!)

Although I did get to hang out with a few of them and they drew pictures while we ordered them food. But still, we couldn't do it all the time. And charity is just not enough; no matter how much food you can buy for one girl, the dynamics are just fucked. But still, I guess you have to try. I would just prefer to loot the fancy restaurants and burn the banks though. So much more direct.

Clayton and I take a colectivo, an old VW van that serves as a bus to and from San Cristobal de las Casas and the nearby villages. The "bus station" is a dusty parking lot full of old white VW vans, next to a creek that is brown from pollution and lined with trash. An old man with a straw hat waits by his small freezer-cart full of popsicles in flavors like peanut and coconut and lime. Indian women with woven plastic bags full of items purchased at the market sit in the shade and wait, chatting.

We twist and lurch in the van up more mountain roads, halting frequently at little villages along the way. Indian women with long, thick black braids, embroidered blouses, and long, black, woolly skirts sit on the side of the highway and watch their ragged sheep munch on grass, leaves, and litter. Some men are out in the sun, plowing almost vertical hillside plots of corn and beans. We pass crumbling little shacks where people live and/ or work; one has "Ranger", a Monsanto product, painted on its side.

In Mexico, advertisements are painted onto the sides of buildings or walls by artists whose talents are squandered on replicating images of Coca-Cola and Pepsi labels. The next generation...in colonization.

On March 19, 2001, the Clandestine Revolutionary Indigenous Committee issued a statement from Mexico City, where for a week, the Zapatista caravan has been waiting for Presidente Fox to fulfill the 3 signals to begin dialogue.

"Vicente Fox's government has paid more attention to the media impact of the march than to the obvious popular, national, and military support which the march for indigenous dignity has awoken during its journey..." the communiqué stated.

"For seven days, since March 13, the EZLN has waited patiently for the Congress to accept its willingness to engage in dignified and respectful dialogue..."

"Given the choice between politicians and the people, the EZLN does not hesitate: it is with the people. It is from them we have received the attentive ear and the respectful word. We shall never lower our heads in front of the politicians, nor will we accept humiliations and deceptions. We will not wait in line in order to be given 'received' stamps on our historic demands..."

The EZLN announces that therefore, they will be leaving but that first they are calling for a "farewell event" in front of the Congress of the Union. They call for all their supporters to participate "to make their voices heard...along with ours, and to reject the politics of exclusion..."

comfortable seats of power.

"Now it is our hour," she began.

"One Mexico...produces wealth, another...appropriates that wealth, and another is the one which has to stretch out its hand for charity.

"We, the indigenous, live in this fragmented country...I would like to explain to you the situation of the indigenous woman who are living in our communities...The situation is very hard.

"We suffer from forgetting because no one remembers us.

"...We do not have drinkable water, electricity, schools, dignified housing, roads, clinics-let alone hospitals- while many of our sisters, women, children and old ones die from curable illnesses, malnutrition and childbirth..."

Commandante Esther spoke of how womyn, from the time they are young, have to go work out in the fields and carry their children, while the men have to go work on the coffee plantations and cane fields, and how sometimes they die there from illnesses.

She talked about how girls are thought to not be "worth anything", and how after being denied the opportunities to go to school and learn to read, girls are forced by their fathers to marry.

Esther told how womyn are mistreated by male relatives and husbands, and how men "tell us we do not have a right to defend ourselves."

She tells of how the mestizos and the wealthy mock indigenous womyn for their culture.

"That is why we decided to organize in order to fight as zapatista women," she explains.

To the Deputies and Senators about the Cocopa law, she said:

"Carry out your word, what you committed yourselves to with the people..."

"We are certain that you do not confuse justice with charity..."

In closing, she remarked:

"And if we are indigenous today, afterwards we will be all those who are dead, persecuted and imprisoned because of their difference."

It gets weird hanging out all day and all night. When there is any bit of manual labor to do, we all rush down so that there'll be something left for us to do.

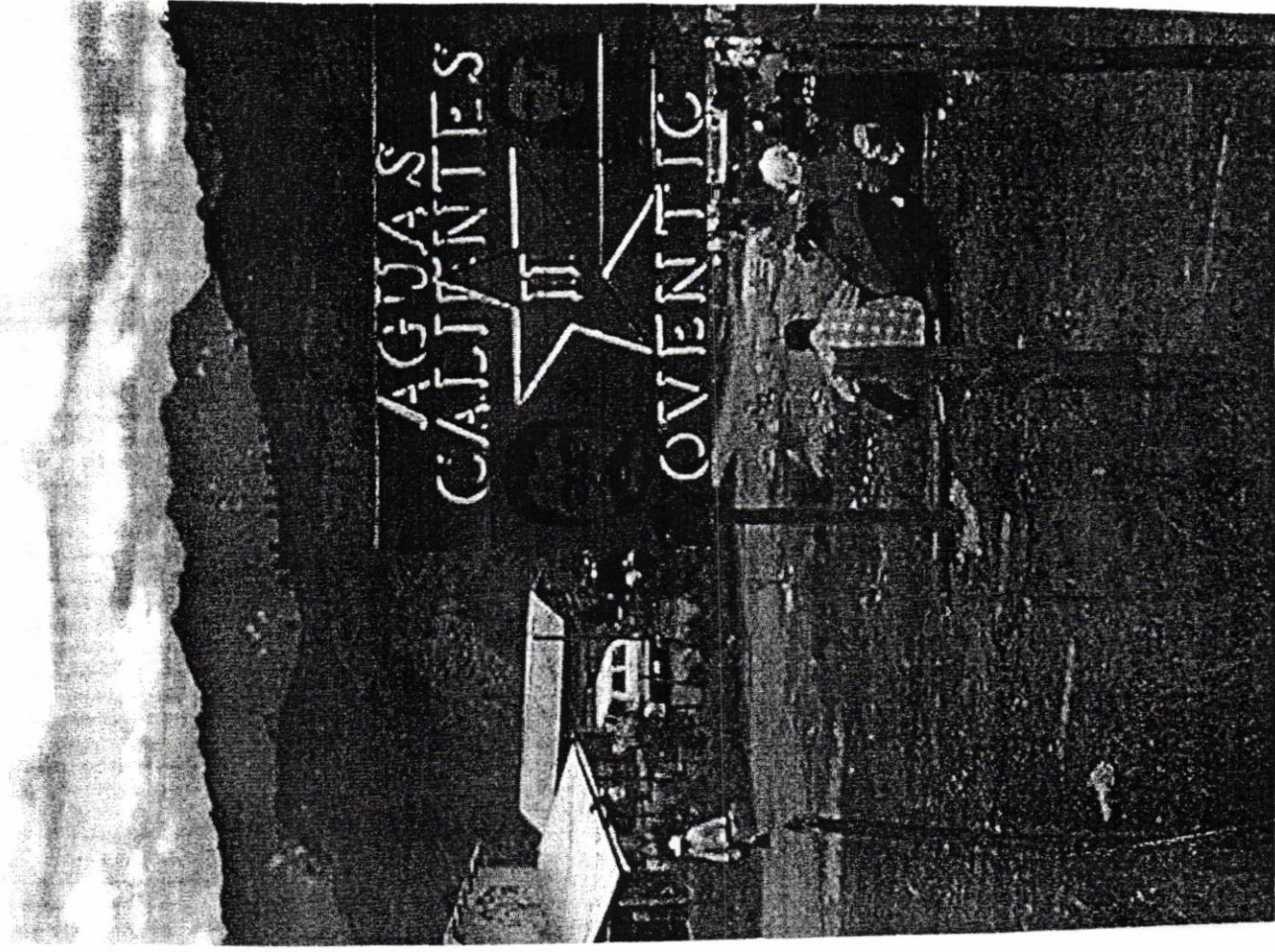
Clay and I get to feeling rather foolish. It's bizarre to think that our physical presence here is worth more to the Zapatistas than our immediate potential labor. International observers are like insurance, we are told. The army tends to be more hesitant about going in and slaughtering everyone if there are foreigners with cameras and passports to home countries that might advise against tourism in Chiapas should one of their citizens get killed or even roughed up.

So we wait and we observe. And wait and observe. Drink coffee and play basketball. So do many others in the cabin. Two of our cabinmates have been waiting over two months to get approval from the council of elders, to go ahead with an interview for a Bay area radio show, and to initiate a pen pal project between the Oventic kids and kids in the U.S. Things move slowly, we are told, and as always, we are impatient.

On March 28, after a mobilization of millions, four of the Zapatista Commandancia spoke to the Mexican Congress to ask them to pass the Cocopa law recognizing indigenous rights and culture.

The first speaker was Commandante Esther, much to the delight of all the womyn gathered at the tienda that night.

The small Indian womyn, the beloved insurgent with a skirt and a ski mask stood up as tonight's spokesperson and addressed the gentry that, a few years ago, never would have thought they would have to hear the lecture of an indigenous womyn in their own



Meanwhile, we're headed out to an autonomous community that we were referred to. Aguascalientes II, or, Oventic. It's easy to tell which stop on the colectivo it is: it's where the huge mural of Che Guevara is painted, with the words "Oventic" and "Aguascalientes II". It's next to the "Tienda Cooperativa", the collective store painted in red and black.

The small wooden gate next to the tienda is guarded by a Zapatista with a handkerchief tied around his face. He is small in stature, no taller than my five-foot-two, but his manner warns caution.

He asks who we are, and we give him the laminated "passes" that were made for us by Enlace Civil, the coordinating group that sent us to this particular EZLN community.

The passes are made of a photocopied passport picture glued onto a piece of construction paper. It tells our names, how long we intend to stay (we say a month), and what group we're with. We may be at an insurgent camp, but we're still in Mexico, and the guard takes our documentation very seriously and walks our homemade identification away to be approved and speculated over.

When we are accepted as "okay", he points across the street to a little cabin on top of a hill I haven't even noticed yet.

It's afternoon and the sun is bright, the sky clear, the weather balmy as we climb up the hill. There are plenty of tall pines in these mountains. A spigot is running endless amounts of water that seems to just be draining down the hillside, which smells strongly of the few horseshit pies we see. A mural commemorating Judi Bari is painted on the wall that the spigot is attached to. At the top of the hill there are two awesome little cabins, both colorfully decorated with paintings of different complementing things, from nature scenes to Subcomandante Marcos riding on a beetle, to Japanese characters, to red and black EZLN stars.

Between the two cabins there is a treehouse/ roost from which a hammock swings in the breeze. At a wooden picnic table there sits three other supporters drinking cowboy coffee.

And granting indigenous autonomy is completely contrary to what "good" puppet rulers of Third World countries should do in order to remain on favorable terms with the U.S. government and military. After all, rights for indigenous and poor people in Mexico would be taken as a threat to the established domination of U.S. corporations and other modern conquistadors of globalization; and then you know what happens to "bad" puppet rulers of Third World countries....

Remember Noriega? Or Saddam?

So we wonder on and watch, and Fox flounders some more, trying to win as many P.R. points as he can through lies and silences, and the EZLN continues to issue poetic communiques of strength, honesty, hope, and of disappointment.

After the news at night in the tienda, there is a movie. Usually it's a bad, but one day it gets even worse and I have the extremely surreal experience of watching "Barb Wire" (starring Pamela Anderson) dubbed in Spanish, surrounded by EZLN insurgents who are glued to the screen like a fly in a web, despite their occasional snickers and comments.

The cabin the international supporters stay at, the one on top of the hill, is dark and gloomy inside despite its festive exterior. In fact, it's really poorly built and it's completely not insulated. When we arrived, the rain (which happened frequently) was kept out by means of plastic sheets and tarps that were stapled to the plywood. There were gaping holes between every piece of plywood- it was as if the cabin had been constructed haphazardly in two days, by supporters who were leaving shortly afterwards, during the warmest and driest part of the year.

For a little while, there are twenty people stuffed into that little one-room shack. At night, with everyone's Mexico-bought hammocks hung from the ceiling at different levels (to maximize capacity), sleeping people sway gently back and forth in their mummy sleeping bags. We resemble larvae waiting to hatch in a drafty, hollow tree trunk.